THE MIRACLE-PLAY.

Religious Drainns in Modern Days - The Passion Play at Obernammergau. A correspondent of the New York Tribune writes as follows: -

OBERAMMERGAN, May 20 .- This long German name looks rather formidable, but only means, in plain English, the upper district on the river Ammer. The place lies in a remote valley of the Bavarian Alps, a little removed from the post road that runs from Munich to Innsbruck, and half way between them. The twelve hundred inhabitants busy themselves chiefly with the conventional Yankee occupation of whittling, but to some purpose, for they produce wood-carvings little inferior to the best Swiss work. The character of the peasantry is quite Tyrolean. The people are honest, obliging, temperate, simple, unburdened with brains, brave, persevering, and pious. Their language is German, somewhat corrupted from that of the Prussian Court, and the religion of the country is universally Roman Catholic. Certainly no peasantry could be better fitted than they to render the solemn scenes of the New Testament.

It is no novelty to find this sacred drama given by peasants; it is merely a relic of the earlier ages. It is a combination, as it were, of the theatre and the church-an artistic performance, actuated by the purest religious motives. The origin of religious drama in the Christian Church is certainly as early as the second century. During that and the following century many of the Bible scenes were dramatized. Among these was, for example, the passion-play (Christos Paschon), ascribed to Gregory of Nazianzum.

We have many proofs of the rapid and wide-spreading taste that existed for these dramas even before the fifth century, and in the tenth century we find the very popular religious dramas of Hroswitha. The exact date, however, at which these plays were put upon the stage is lost in the impenetrable gloom of the Dark Ages; but there exists proof that they were given in Bohemia and Thuringia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The subjects of these "mysteries," or miracle-plays, were taken from both the Old and New Testament, and from the lives of the saints, the New Testament being generally preferred. The actors were for a long time priests only, and when it became necessary, from the greater number of parts, to introduce the laity, it was only to fill the minor positions, and the clergy still continued to act the principal roles, such as those of Christ and the Apostles.

Little by little abuses crept in, and some plays written by the laity were contrary to the dogmas of the Church, so that the pure faith of many listeners was shaken. Gorres relates that during a representation of the Mysteries at Eisenach, "the five foolish virgins asked their companions in vain for some oil. They were then shut out by the bridegroom, and began weeping and begging the aid of the saints; but neither the saints nor the Virgin Mary were able to bring about the reprieve of their condemnation. The Landgrave of Thuringia seeing this, was filled with doubts and rage, crying aloud, 'What does this Christian faith amount to if God cannot be moved by the intercession of Mary and the saints?' And it was only, says the grave chronicler, after five days of fierce struggle with his doubts that the Landgrave was brought to a true understanding of the Scriptures through the efforts of the learned doc-So it took a day apiece to convince him about the virgins.

Although the subjects of these religious dramas were always taken from Scripture, vet the characters and their language are often purely imaginative or allegorical.

It happens frequently that the liveliest scenes and most interesting dialogues are wholly the invention of the author. The Zeitschrift fur Deutsches Alterthum gives the following song, which I translate from the Old German. Mary Magdalene, who is still a sinner, comes upon the stage with Lucifer and several other devils, who all praise her beauty in the highest terms. Mary is not in the least disconcerted by their praise, but is rather pleased with it, and sings to them in response:

will deck out my form, I'm a woman so fair, And will dance just a turn With a layman or triar; For I love to be springing, And a jolly song singing. I spread my mantle in the field, And my lady begins to ask Where I have been so very long? What business is it of hers? Shall I not make free With my body, I'll see.

Martha next appears and beseeches Mary to repent, but Mary sings gaily: -Take care of thine own soul, sister dear, I will let thee, with all my heart,

But I will be happy and gay, And, therefore, I carnestly pray That thou wilt go thy heavenly way, And not beg me to repent any more, But leave me, for thou art becoming a bore. Shortly afterward the repentance of Mary Magdalene is brought about, and she is represented very much as Correggio and Battoni have given her to us on canvas. But none of these episodes occur in the passion play as

it is now given at Ammergau. The present text is written strictly in accordance with the Bible. It was carefully revised about 1815 by a monk named Weiss. The music for the chorus and orchestra was

composed by Dedler, the village schoolmaster, and in many parts does credit to a true master of composition.

The origin of the Ammergau play is much more peculiar than most of the others, for in 1633 a pestilence resulting from the Thirty Years' War raged through the Tyrol even to the secluded village of Oberammergan, where 80 persons died within a month. The pious and superstitious peasants then took a vow to represent the Passion of Christ every ten years, if the plague should be removed, and after that day, according to tradition, no death occurred. The play was given accordingly in the following year, 1634, for the first time, and was continued every tenth year until 1704, when the Prince Archbishop of Salzburg-under whose jurisdiction Ammergau fell-forbade every such performance as being profane, ludicrous, distracting, inducing intemperance on account of the large concourse of people, and exposing the Church

to the ridicale of free thinkers. The measures taken by the secular authorities to put this decree of suppression into effect were so vigorous that almost every representation of the kind was discontinued That at Ammergau, owing probably to its pecoliar origin, was still given, notwithstanding all opposition. But, in 1810, the Abbey of Ettal, founded by Louis of Bavaria, and situated at the head of the pass, became secularized, and the peasants lost its ecclesiastical support. The renewed efforts of the Munich authorities again very nearly effected the entire suppression of the passion play; but a deputation of the determined pessants pushed their way to the very throne of Max Joseph, then reigning in Bavaria, and obtained from him a special permission for its further continuance, and it is owing to this that the play tion and perfection than any there also in i

Europe. The theatre stands in a large field, just outside the village, has no roof, and is put up and taken down for each decennial representation. The stage consists of a broad, open space, eighty feet wide and twenty deep, which is in front of the dropcurtain, and occupied by the chorus. Immediately behind this Vorderbuhns or front stage is another, with all the usual appointments of a theatre, having on either side a balcony, a street running back, and pillars at the extreme end. The auditorium is oblong. and furnished only with wooden benches and will seat 5000 to 6000 people. The slope of the floor is considerable, so that every one sees the whole stage. There are three boxes at the back of the house, in the middle, capable of seating 200 people, and intended as my peasant guide remarked, for "royalty, counts, Americans, and other high person-

The corps of actors reaches the number of 400, all of whom reside in the village itself, so that every third person takes part in the play. The theatrical wardrobe is made more elegant for each decennial representation, and the additions this year, together with the scenery, etc., have cost over \$10,000. The receipts in 1850 amounted to that sum. In 1860 the figure was still higher, and this season even a greater number of visitors is

The lowest priced seats are 25 cents, and the seats in the princely boxes ruin a man to the amount of \$1°25. The same play is repeated every Sunday during the summer months.

The parts are assigned to the actors in January, and the piece is rehearsed once a week until its first representation, which comes usually on the last Sunday in May. The chief roles are assigned with great care. The part of the Saviour is given to the man who best combines a talent for acting and suitable age with a personal resemblance to the accepted ideal of Christ's face. It was rendered in 1850 by Joseph Flunger; in 1860 by Schauer, and this year by Jo-seph Meyer, carver in wood, and thirty-six years of age. I saw him this morning conversing in a very friendly manner with the Apostle Peter. The likeness of Meyer to the pictures of Christ is really very striking, and the resemblance is heightened by the accessories of the play. The part of Mary, the mother of Jesus, has been given this year to the daughter of Flunger. The decennial recurrence of the play naturally prevents the same man from acting the same part more than twice, for otherwise twenty years would have elapsed between the first and last times, and he would have changed too much, for these honest peasants are unwilling to make old men young by the kindly assistance of rouge and powder.

The following is a description of the performance by the same writer under date of

It would be impossible for any one to believe, without seeing it, that a body of peasants could render a drama with so much taste, accuracy, and magnificence as the peasants of Oberam-mergau showed in giving the Passion Play. But I have seen, and seeing is believing.

At 8 o'clock we were all safely ensconced in our seats. Over five thousand people were pre-sent, mostly peasants. Two or three hundred Germans of the better class, and a mere sprinkling of English, filled up the boxes. There was a gravity in every face that bespoke an earnest, pious frame of mind. There was that quiet manner of going to their seats so peculiarly itted for the house of prayer rather than for the theatre. The report of a cannon announced 8 o'clock, and the whole house was hushed into silence before the echoes from the mountain sides had ceased. That multitude had come in a true spirit of devotion. The play is entitled

THE GREAT OFFERING OF PROPITIATION UPON GOL-GOTHA:

The History of the Sufferings and Death of Jesus," According to the Four Evangelists, with edifying tableaux from the Old Testament, and consists of a prologue, and eighteen "Vor-stellungen." Each Verstellung is made up thus: -The chorus of twenty come upon the prosecnium from either side, arrange themselves in a line and sing two or more verses descriptive of the tableau that follows. The singers then divide in the centre, and draw back a little, the curtain rises and discovers a tableau-vivant upon the stage proper-the chorus leader sings another explanatory verse, which occupies usually two or three minutes, the curtain falls, the chorus comes forward again, sings two or three more verses, and leaves the stage. The

tinues about fifteen minutes, and ends the Vor-This same routine is followed in each subdivision, and the Old Testament tableau is always typical of the action that follows. Sometimes there are two or three tableaux and the singing is varied by solos, duetts, and antiphons. The music was written by Rochus Dedler, a native of Ammergau, whe died in 1822.

The subjects of the tableaux and the actions

regular action of the play is then given, con-

of which they are typical are as follows:-Tableau-Adam and Eve driven from the Garden of Eden. Action-Prologue spoken by the leader of the chorus .- Christ enters Jerusalem amid the acclamations of the people, drives the buyers and sellers from the Temple, and returns to

Bethany. Tableau-The sons of Jacob determine to put their brother Joseph out of the way.

Action—The High Priests and Scribes take counsel how they may bring Jesus into their

Tableau-(a) Tobias takes leave of his parents .-(b) The bride bewalls the loss of her bride-Action—Christ anointed by Mary; Judas mur-murs at this.—Christ bids farewell to

Tableau-King Ahasuerus puts away Vashti and raises Esther. tion-Christ goes with his disciples to Jerusalem. Weeps at the view of the sinful city, and sends two disciples to prepare the Easter Lamb. Judas forms the design of

betraying his Master. Tableau-God gives manna to the people, and grapes from Canaan. Action-Christ celebrates the Paschal Meal, and institutes the Lord's Supper.

VI. Tableau-Jacob's sons sell their brother for twenty pieces of silver. Action - Judas comes to the Sanhedrim and promises to deliver his Master into the hands of the Pharisees for thirty pieces of silver, and they determine upon the death of

Tableau-(a) Adam is forced to cat bread carned in the sweat of his brow .- (b) Joab, under pretense of kissing Amasa, stabs him through ction-Christ suffers the death-like agony on the Mount of Olives; is betrayed by Judas, and taken by the rabble.

PART SECOND. VIII. Tableau-Micaiah the Prophet receives a blow on the check for speaking the truth to King Action-Christ is brought before Annas, and is struck in the face.

IX. is now given with more attempt at elabora- Tableau-(a) The guilliess Naboth is con- the tableau, and not one moment's delay or conmention by lake withcomes. - (b) say safferd | factor was to be obesived. No corps of metors | founds, formed D Ba deep & D .

Action-Christ is taken to Calaphas, is declared guilty, denied by Peter, ridiculed and mal-treated by the soldiers.

Tableau—Cain feeling the pangs of conscience wanders restless and homeless over the face

Action-The Chief Priests confirm Christ's condemnation. Judas comes before them full of repentance, casts down the sliver pieces, and driven by despair determines to hang

Tableau-Daniel is accused before King Darius, and is thrown into the iions' den. Action-Christ led before Pllate, is declared not guilty, and is taken before Herod. XII.

Tableau—Samson is forced to amuse the Princes of the Philistines. Action-Herod treats Christ with ridicule and contempt and sends him back to Pilate.

Tableau-(a) Joseph's coat covered with blood. -(b) Discovery in the thicket of the ram. destined to be offered in the place of Isaac tion-Christ is taken again before Pilate, who demands of the people whether he shall re-lease Christ or Barabbas, and suffers Christ to be scourged.

Tableau—(a) Joseph is presented to the people as their Governor.—(b) The lots are east which of the two rams shall be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of the people, and

which shall be set free.

Action—Pilate shows Christ with the crown of thorns to the people, who demand that Barabbas shall be set free, and that Christ shall be crucified. Pilate yields to the people and condemns Christ to death.

PART THIRD. XV.

Tableau—(a) Isaac goes up the mountain bearing the fagots for his own sacrifice.—(b) Moses raises the brazen serpent upon a pole. -(c) The Israelites are healed from the bites of the serpents by looking at the brazen serpent.

ction-Christ is taken to Golgotha bearing his cross, and meets his sorrowing mother. Simon of Cyrene is forced to bear the cross. XVI.

Prologue-Recitative. Action-Christ raised upon the cross, the thieves on either side. Christ is taken from the cross and laid in the tomb. XVII.

Tableau-(a) Jonah is thrown upon the land by the whale.—(b) The people of Israel pass through the Red Sea on dry land, and their enemies perish in the waves. Action-The Resurrection of Christ. The soldiers give information of it to the Chief Priests. An angel informing the women of the resurrection.

The ascension of Christ. The chorus singing-Conquering and to conquer all Forth He comes in all His might, Slumbering but a few short hours,

In the grave's funereal night. Hallelujah! Christ is risen, etc., etc. Some of these analogies-as, for instance, the sixth, tenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth-are well chosen and forcible, while others are rather far-fetched. The immobility of the figures in the tableaux was almost absolute. In the fifth and fourteenth there were over two hundred persons on the stage, including many young children, some of whom stood with outstretched arms, and held this tiresome position over three minutes. Their success in doing so probably arises from the fact that they are accustomed to work, so that their muscles have become tough. g was arranged by a native artist, from old drawings and pictures.

The great unities were admirably brought out. The gracefulness of composition and of individual pose was truly artistic, while the harmony of colors in the costumes displayed extraordinary skill in arrangement. The imitation of the old masters was most patent. St. John was taken evidently from Albert Durer's picture in the Munich Gallery. St. Peter might well have sat for the St. Pietro in Lagrime of Guido in the Pitti at Florence, and Mary was a good copy of Carlo Dolci, or better yet of Sassoferrato; but the half-diviae Madonna of Murillo in the Pitti, or Raphael's San Sisto, was not to be seen. The neutral and mixed tints of the Apostles' robes were peculiarly good, that is to say, good if we consider the pictures of the early masters as models-and we certainly have no

It has been said that all art moves in a circle, commencing with simplicity and ending there - and this very simplicity is the most striking feature in the Ammergau drama. When the countryman went to see Garrick and was asked how he liked him he replied, "I don't call that acting; for he does just as any common man would do." This utter absence of conventionalism is the charm of the acting of these peasants. Their gestures were easy, their enunciation was distinct and unaffected. And even our Booth or the far-famed German Devrient might study to advantage the walk of these amateurs, and learn to abandon the ungraceful stage-stride. The entrance into Jerusalem after the opening

tableau was very impressive, because the humanity of Christ seemed so real. The living man seated on the ass, blessing the little children, and seemingly conscious of his future suffering, banished all remembrance of the divinity of Christ and fastened the mind upon Jesus, the man of sorrows. There was not one single word or action of the Christus that jarred on the feelings. Throughout the drama His action was full of calm dignity, of sweet resignation, of meekness and tender love. His supe rior position was well brought out. No familiarity was used towards Him by the disciples. Peter and John were the only ones who ever came very close to Him. The last supper, the scene in the garden of Gethsemane, the trial and the scourging, considered purely from a critical standpoint, could not be surpassed. The

acting was perfect. The character of Judas was well represented. Its contrast to that of the Christ made it even more conspicuous. Judas was always uneasy and restless—quick in his movements and conscious. The scene was peculiarly good where the servant of the High Priest first proposed to him the betrayal of his master. He wavered and then started to go away, frightened at the atrocity of the crime, but the further mention of money worked too strongly on his avarice and he yielded to the temptation. His eagerness to receive the money from the Council, his uneasiness at the Last Supper, his guilty, stealthy manner in the garden, and his final remorse, were all very finely rendered. Saints Peter and John were also very good. Another well-conceived and well-executed point in the play was the tone and manner of the Chief Priests and Scribes. During the trial they maintained a stiff official dignity, and were much concerned about the public good, but when they left the councilhall they displayed all their selfish motives and

underhanded designs. The old Greek conventionalism of having the multitude speak in concert was the only real fault to be found in the piece, and this often married the effect seriously. It was very much out of place when the multitude enters Jerusalem with Christ, and still more so when the people clamored for the death of Christ and the release of Barabbas. Various, unregulated cries would be the natural and most evident manner of expressing the agitation of a crowd, but in the Passion-play there is no deviation from this frequently-recurring conventionalism at once so

impossible, unnatural and unpleasant.

The parts of the women were rather insignifi-The parts of Calaphas-Pilate, the two thieves, and Barabbas were all good. During the eight hours of this first representation not a single mishap occurred, either on the stage or in the audience. Not an actor hesitated once for a cant, and not so well given as those of the men. word. Not a premature entree or exit, not even word. Not a premature entree or exit, not even

patiently the revilings of his wife and i in Europe could gain the histrionic victory that these peasants have gained. During four hours in the morning and four hours in the afternoon, they riveted the eyes of 6000 observers, and chained their attentions to the action.

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